

**Small *Ranunculus Hecatera dysodea* (D.& S.) (Lep.: Noctuidae)
in Monmouthshire**

On 15 July 1999, members of Community Action for Wildlife in Newport met at a car park to the south-east of the city, before heading off to an evening's moth trapping. One of the group, Roger James, handed round a number of moths he had captured at light the previous night in his garden. Amongst these was a small noctuid that defied casual identification by Martin Anthoney, the Monmouthshire Lepidoptera Recorder, and myself. The moth was given to me for further examination and, once set, with the dark shading of the hind wings now visible, it was clear that it was a dark, strongly-marked example of the Small *Ranunculus Hecatera dysodea*.

According to Heath and Emmet (1983. *Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland* 9: 226-227), the last British record of this species was in 1941 after which it was presumed extinct until re-discovered in the Thames Estuary area by David Agassiz in 1997 (Agassiz & Spice, 1998. *Ent. Rec.* 110: 229-232). It was recorded up to about the turn of the century from Glamorgan and Herefordshire (Heath & Emmet *loc. cit.*), but was not previously noted from Monmouthshire (VC50) and is absent from the published county list (Horton, 1994. *Monmouthshire Lepidoptera – the butterflies and moths of Gwent*). However, it had evidently disappeared from most of its range, including all of Wales and the border areas, by 1912.

Roger James' house and garden sit on a small prominence some 1.5 kilometres west of the centre of Newport, with an uninterrupted view south and south-east over the lower Usk Valley and the Severn Estuary, to the coasts of Somerset and Gloucestershire. Of thirty-one species trapped on 14 July 1999, all but the Small *Ranunculus* were common residents, though according to meteorological information kindly supplied by Bruce Campbell, Keeper of Natural Sciences at Newport Museum, there was a steady to stiff southerly breeze on the night of 14 July.

There were many entomologist visitors to the Thames Estuary sites during 1998, most of whom evidently removed larvae for rearing at home. The abundance of larvae there in that year, and their cryptic habit when at rest on the foodplant, meant that most people actually returned with rather more larvae than they intended. There is thus the inevitable possibility that the Newport example could have originated as either an escape or a deliberate release, perhaps in the local area or as a wind blown example from across the Severn Estuary. However, the reappearance of the moth in its former Thames Estuary sites came as a complete surprise and is as yet unexplained. With this in mind, it is not at all possible to dismiss the Welsh record.

Roger James only began moth trapping in his garden on 27 April 1999 so, along with a Vestal *Rhodometra sacrararia* (L.), captured on 20 September 1999, the Small *Ranunculus* is certainly his most interesting capture so far.– MARTIN J. WHITE, 8 St. Nicholas Square, Maritime Quarter, Swansea SA1 1UG.